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*Peter Roussel*

# The Bush I Used to Know

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 The New York Times \_\_\_\_\_  
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 The Wall Street Journal \_\_\_\_\_  
 The Christian Science Monitor \_\_\_\_\_  
 New York Daily News \_\_\_\_\_  
 USA Today \_\_\_\_\_  
 The Chicago Tribune \_\_\_\_\_

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Who is this fellow George Bush whom I keep hearing reference to in connection with the so-called wimp factor? Surely this isn't the same man I served as press secretary when he was in Congress, and later when he ran for the Senate, served as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and was chairman of the Republican National Committee. Can this be the same person with whom I traveled thousands of miles and thought I had gotten to know not only as a companion of the road but with something akin to a brotherlike closeness?

When I hear talk of George Bush and the "wimp factor," I think back to the time that he and I and his wife,

Barbara, were flying in a tiny twin-engine plane when suddenly the door ripped open on my side, threatening to tear loose, smash into the propeller and take us all down to a watery grave in Lake Michigan. As I sat there in paralyzed panic, George calmly leaned across the pilot and helped pull the throttles back, feathering the engines, then reached out and helped us win the titanic struggle to pull the door shut against incredibly powerful wind resistance. He never lost his cool while helping to save all our lives.

I wonder if the George Bush I hear some of his detractors talking about is the same man with whom I crisscrossed the blistered plains of Texas as he campaigned for a Senate seat. I saw something in those days of how he reacted to the seamy side of politics. "Mr. Bush," he was challenged one day by a potential supporter, "what are you going to do about the nigger vote?" What he did was abruptly arise and exit, his departing words pointed and brusque: "Pete, this conversation has just ended." He was impatient with and intolerant of any form of racism—an election be damned.

Is this the same person who left the Republican revelry on Inaugural Day 1969 to maintain a vigil at the fence at Andrews Air Force Base so that he could say goodbye to a fellow Texan, Lyndon Johnson, as he relinquished the reins of the presidency? Lest I be accused of being a press secretary who put words in his boss' mouth, here's the essence of what I remember him telling me: "The day he left Washington, I went out to the airport. I just felt that there was a guy who had served his country for 35 years, who had served with my father and was from my state. I just thought it would be courteous for me to go out there."

I saw some of this same quality in Bush when he was U.N. ambassador at the height of the Vietnam War and traveled to the campus of a prominent southern university to address its student body. He was greeted by a steady

barrage of hoots, taunts, catcalls and downright gutter language, not to mention a fusillade of flying fruit, paper airplanes and other debris. But through it all, Bush not only held his ground and his fire, managing to finish his speech, but was able to open up the dialogue and take on all comers in a bravura performance that ultimately succeeded in turning the rest of the audience against the rowdies.

The George Bush I know does not blow with the wind. He does what he thinks is right, whether it's popular or not. I still remember his fire-breathing speech on his first day as Republican national chairman, when he said that all liquor was banned from GOP headquarters during his tenure. It wasn't the most popular or easy way to deal with what he saw as a problem there, but that didn't stop him.

In 1976 Bush asked to be removed from consideration as Gerald Ford's vice president so that his confirmation as CIA director could expeditiously move forward. This was the act of a man whose sense of public service takes priority over his personal ambition. At those same confirmation hearings, when asked what he would do if the president ordered the CIA to overthrow a foreign government and that such information not be disclosed even under oath, Bush unflinchingly answered, "I would do what the law says. . . . I wouldn't lie."

That is the George Bush I knew. We still keep in touch, and judging from the letters I get (I know he types them himself because of all the typographical errors), he doesn't seem to have changed all that much. So I'll just continue to wonder: Who is this George Bush whom some persist in calling a wimp? He's not anybody I know.

*The writer has been a press aide to George Bush and deputy White House press secretary.*